

Safe Sidewalks For All

February 26, 2018

City of Regina Council Meeting

My name is Ashley Nemeth I am the Program Lead for the CNIB here in Regina. I am also blind, this is my guide dog Rick. I travel to and from work from The Greens to 2160 Broad Street every day. I also rely on walking and transit to get around the city, getting my children to appointments and all those every day things that come up. So on a personal level I am able to speak to the issue that we are currently facing in Regina with the sidewalks being inaccessible in many areas.

As many people who are blind or partially sighted try to navigate in the winter, it becomes much more difficult with the conditions that winter brings. It isn't just the cold that makes winter hard but the snow, ice and other obstacles that make it impossible sometimes to get out of the house.

A large portion of our clients are seniors so not only are they struggling with diminishing vision but in many cases mobility issues as well.

When you live with low vision things like glare and depth perception can be debilitating in them selves. When you look out at the streets and sidewalks all you will see is white, you won't be able to tell where the sidewalk begins or ends and if there are higher areas and lower areas. The glare that comes off of the snow can also eliminate any vision that a person may have.

When your only mode of transportation is walking or city transit, and a cane, things get really difficult as the sidewalks become inaccessible, and dangerous. A cane gets stuck in the snow and

can not be used properly to navigate when sidewalks are not clear. Many times, it is nearly impossible to determine where the sidewalks are compared to the side of the streets. Some residents will shovel their driveways onto the sidewalk blocking the sidewalk completely. As we all know and have experienced snow packs down it becomes icy, this is dangerous for anyone, now imagine if you could not see that ice how hard, and dangerous it would be to navigate.

When using a guide dog, it can be hard for the same reasons, the dogs can have a hard time deciphering where the sidewalk is compared to the street. It also becomes dangerous as the ground is icy and uneven and you are trying to navigate without being to see any of it. It is not only dangerous for the handler but also for the service animal. If a service animal was to sustain an injury due to slipping on ice or uneven ground, they could have to retire and stop working. This is something that many of us with guide dogs fear as these dogs are our independence, without them we would not be able to live the lives that we have chosen for ourselves.

Many times, there are things on the sidewalks like garbage cans, sandwich board signs, when we add in snow and ice from people not keeping them clean we are creating an inaccessible and dangerous environment for many of our most vulnerable residents. We want people with disabilities to live full, amazing lives, and be productive members of society. In order to do that they need to be able to navigate our city in an accessible and safe manner.

Thank you for allowing me to come tonight and share why myself and the CNIB support the motion for Safe and Accessible Sidewalks. We want to promote an accessible city where we are not forcing those with disabilities to become home bound during winter months when there is a simple solution.